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ABSTRACT

Career education represents an effort of the public school system to be responsive to changing community needs and values. A two-way communication program between the school and the community is vital if career education is to gain the necessary acceptance to be effective. This paper calls for a district-wide decentralized community relations and communications program to provide the public with more accurate information on schools in general and on career education in particular. Aspects of a constructive community relations program are outlined, with staffing requirements, the organizational structure, and developmental steps suggested as a guide for program planners. Predetermined objectives and careful planning are emphasized for the diffusion of the career education concept, and major planning requirements are detailed in the paper. Support of these key publics is essential for success: the internal public (administrator and teachers), the influential publics in the community, and the news media. Each of these publics is described, along with the ways in which the school system may move to achieve its objectives. The schools must take the initiative to insure that the public gets the information it requires to understand the program and to cooperate with those effecting changes in school curricula. (Author/VT)

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CAREER EDUCATION: COMMUNICATING THE CONCEPT

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CAREER EDUCATION:

COMMUNICATING THE CONCEPT

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INTRODUCTION

Career education is a bold and exciting concept that holds promise for great improvement in the nation's education. Whether this new concept succeeds or fails will depend, in the final count, on whether it generates sufficient public understanding and support by the communities it is intended to serve. The progress of schools in serving the young depends upon the support of the community. This is a hard fact of public life many school administrators have yet to grasp--despite signs of growing disaffection and lack of support accorded public education today. The "papa knows best" attitude of the school administrator is still prevalent despite the hard jolts schools have taken in bond elections and referenda, and in books and articles of recent years. Former Commissioner Marland says that if this program is to succeed, "The first attitude we should change, I suggest, is our own. We must purge ourselves of academic snobbery." Shedding the all too common "academic snobbery" requires taking the public into partnership in the launching and implementation of career education. Nothing less will insure its success.

One of the reasons for the rising criticism and declining support for public education is the wide gulf between schools and their communities. Too often the school is not part of the community; its professional administrators and staff are self-centered in their certitude as to what is best for other parents' children. Successful education must redefine the process of school governance to include the parents, who are as concerned and who can be as helpful as the teachers and administrators, in shaping sound educational patterns. The gulf between educators, parent, and taxpayer can only be bridged by a planned two-way communications program. This is the essence of school-community relations.

The failure of many educational administrators to take the public into partnership is born in their instruction in the art and techniques of administration. Much of the instruction in schools of education has its origins in the scientific management theories of Taylor introduced in industry early in this century, or in the theories of Weber. The latter has perhaps been more influential in education. The traditional organization theories of *Scientific Management*

by Taylor or *Administrative Management or Bureaucracy* by Weber have tended to view the human organization as a "closed system." The tendency has led to a disregard of differing organizational environments and the nature of organizational dependency on environment. It has led to an overconcentration on principles of internal organizational functioning, with consequent failure to develop and understand the processes of feedback essential to survival. This is as outmoded as the "public be damned" attitude of the businessman or the "professional educator knows best" attitude of the schoolman toward the publics upon whose support they must depend if they are to accomplish their mission.

The closed system approach treats human beings as machines or units, creates dependence on material and tangible rewards, and assumes that rational, scientific management can fully control the environment within the four, high walls of a closed school system or industrial plant. The approach also assumes that conflict is inherent between the objectives of the formal rational organization and those of the individual members. All those upon whom career education depends for success must accept the fact that the "closed system" management approach is outmoded and loaded with pitfalls.

All too slowly the closed system approach in administration is being displaced by the more realistic "open systems" approach. The latter suggests that even though organizations have properties of their own, they share other properties in common with all open systems. These include importing energy from the environment, transforming the imported energy into some product form which is characteristic of the system, exporting that product into the environment, and re-energizing the system from sources in the environment. To simplify, the unseen "walls" which surround and enclose a school system, within which rational administration controls the curriculum, teaching effort and pupil response, exist only in the insulated administrator's mind. In fact, there are no walls around schools. Their absence permits community opinion to flow as freely into the schools as pupil, teacher, and administrator opinions flow back into the community. The external opinions of the community must be faced, understood, and dealt with inside the school system. There is no escape from this reality.

A planned, constructive, and continuous program of school-community relations is consistent with the open systems theory of administration. The open system theory emphasizes the

feedback function of obtaining adequate information about changes in the environmental forces which flow in across the now shattered walls of all public institutions. The most important task of the community relations staff is to constantly monitor the community's public opinion environment and to interpret their findings to the administrators and teachers in the school system. In no other way can the school programs and policies be kept adaptable within the diverse views and needs of the public the schools were created to serve. Thoughtful consideration of the "open" versus "closed" system of administration gives new importance to the essentiality of the school-community relations function.

Entrapment in the closed system theory of administration with its resulting insularity and insensitivity to the winds of the public climate, is not unique to school personnel. All public institutions today--city, state, and federal governments; corporations; colleges; churches; community agencies--are under heavy assault from articulate and sometimes angry sectors of the public. Central to the growing public criticism is that these institutions, including the schools, are no longer responsive to the needs of the publics they serve because of the institutions rigidity and outmoded policies. Only by encouraging a free flow of idea and opinion input from the community can the institutions become responsive to changing community needs and values. Unless they can bend and adapt to these winds of change, they risk being broken in the gales that will inevitably follow. Public schools are no exceptions. Career education represents an effort to be responsive.

Another major reason many of America's urban school systems are in serious trouble today is that modern communication requirements have not been met. It is not possible for a school system to operate successfully today unless there is easy and appropriate communication between those directly engaged in the enterprise and those served by the enterprise. With few exceptions, the large urban school systems have fallen far behind other public and private enterprises in making the communications effort necessary for successful operation.

The nature of a public school system is such that maximum results depend upon gaining more understanding and support from more individuals and groups than for any other major institution in our society. Today more information

must be communicated to more persons over longer lines of communication to get tasks coordinated and accomplished. Too often professional educators and school boards have assumed that requirements for securing institutional and public understanding will be carried out in some automatic fashion without the necessary plans, manpower commitments and use of funds.

NEED FOR AN ORGANIZED SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONS PROGRAM

The requirement for a systematic, planned, continuous program of two-way communication between the school and the community is doubly demanding if career education is to gain the necessary acceptance to be effective. Resistance to change is the strongest law of human nature, existing inside and outside the school system. Paving the way for change is a basic task for public relations. To a degree far beyond that of today's public education patterns, the K-12 career education curriculum will require an involvement and support of the community unprecedented in public education. We fully agree with Burt, who stated:

> If Career Education is to help youth in becoming responsible and productive individuals in a continuously changing and developing society..., the cherished professional isolation of educators must be discarded for a new type of professional educational leadership--the kind of leaders who will literally tumble the school walls down so that students and teachers will continually be in the community and the community in the schools (1973:1).

Success of the career education program depends upon the creation of an educator-parent partnership. This will require a commitment on the part of all charged with setting and implementing the program to (1) take the public into partnership in a sharing of ideas, goals, and participation in the program; (2) to provide an adequately staffed community relations program which can provide opinion and information feedback from the community, and counsel administrators and staff on ways of adjusting to or changing the views and values of the various publics as they impinge on career

education; and (3) to interpret, effectively and continuously, the program's goals, plans, methods of implementation to the community, in the full realization that only informed support will be enduring support.

Essential aspects of a constructive community relations program are:

1) Commitment to public partnership on the part of administrators and teachers;

2) Competence in the school-community relations staff;

3) Centralization of community relations policy-making;

4) Free-flowing communication from and to publics, up, down, across; and

5) Coordination of all efforts to insure accomplishment of predetermined goals.

Commitment of the administration--in Washington, in the state, and in the school--is the bedrock on which an effective community relations program is built. The community relations function will be as large and useful or as inconsequential and ineffective as the administrators wish it to be.

STAFFING REQUIREMENTS

An essential for a community relations program adequate for the essential public cooperation requirements of career education is an ample and competent staff. This is particularly demanding at the local level where the school-community relations program must be tailored to meet the requirements of the particular community and where it must be implemented on a day-in, day-out basis. Unless adequate provisions are made to strengthen the communication capability of the administration, it will be virtually impossible to achieve the maximum effectiveness of career education.

The following organizational structure is suggested as a guide to those developing community relations programs for career education.

A Department of Communications and Community Relations

The title of the department head may well vary from school to school, depending upon the organizational patterns and policies. He might be called an assistant superintendent or Director of Community Relations. In any event, the department:

1) Will provide a system of fast, flexible internal communications to keep all personnel informed and to keep rumor and misinformation to the minimum;

2) Will develop a community monitoring mechanism, including personal contacts, advisory committees, opinion surveys, and analyses of news media content, to keep administrators and staff fully informed of community views, values, and needs as these relate to public schools;

3) Will carry out a systematic program of public communication, utilizing media, organizations and groups, to generate interest in and support for career education;

4) Will provide consultant and planning services to the administrators, teachers, and school board; and

5) Will coordinate planning and development of information and community relations operations in the sub-areas of the community-wide system.

The demanding position of Director of Community Relations involves providing vital consultation assistance to the office of the superintendent while developing the department itself and assisting in the development of area communications and community relations facilities.

The latter includes the extension of assistance through the districts to the individual schools. It involves working out basic policies and operational procedures creating the closest possible cooperative relationships with instructors and staff. The complementary nature of the functions of the two types of operations is not clearly understood. Delineation of responsibilities and mutual understanding of operations will be imperative at all levels. In many instances effectiveness of the administrative operation will depend to a great extent upon the degree of coordination which has been achieved. This delineation must be reflected in written policy.

The Director's staff will depend, to some degree, on the size of the school system. At the minimum he should have two assistants, one skilled in preparation of material for the news media, publications, and visual materials and the other available to "bird-dog" the work at the district levels, overseeing the relationships with key groups in the community. Ideally, the staff should include:

1) A newsman-writer experienced in dealing with the news media and skilled in the preparation of information for both print and electronic media. In addition to having generalist skills, the person would work with the public service and program directors of radio and television stations in the development of informative programs on career education, thus utilizing the power of these media to shape community attitudes and action.

2) An editor-writer who would have the chief editorial responsibility for all publications and would be particularly responsible for internal communications.

Community Relations and Special Events

Many community groups and organizations are greatly interested in the schools and desire to increase their understanding and support of improved education. Their difficulty is finding how to communicate with the school system and how to engage in suitable activities and projects. Career education offers a new opportunity to make use of this latent

support and resource. A person capable of effecting liaison with such groups and of channeling their support is an investment in career education's success.

STEPS IN DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY RELATIONS PROGRAM

A community relations program adequate to the needs of career education embraces four steps. Community relations should never be seen as mere publicity-getting, which is a vitiating weakness of many educational public relations programs. Public relations may be likened to an iceberg, three-fourths of it is unseen below the surface. The one-fourth--publicity--that sticks above the water is too often taken to be the whole iceberg. The unseen three-fourths--research, planning, and evaluation--are generally more important in the long run.

Fact Finding and Feedback

The only base upon which a successful community relations program can be built is one constructed on systematic research. This intelligence function has been defined as "the problem of gathering processing, interpreting, and communicating the technical and political information needed in the decision-making process." Harold L. Wilensky elaborates:

> The more an organization is in conflict with its social environment or depends on it for the achievement of central goals, the more resources it will allocate to the intelligence function and the more of those resources will be spent on experts whom we might call "contact men." The contact man supplies political and ideological intelligence the leader needs in order to find his way around modern society (1967).

The community relations officer in each school system is, in essence, this "contact man."

Because career education is a highly innovative program, conflict with the traditional environment in education must

be expected. This will put a heavier than usual burden on the intelligence funtion.

Fact finding requires building a substantial library of information on career education and on school curricula in general. The library must serve the needs of administrators, teachers, and community spokesmen. It provides the support base for preparation of slide or flip-chart talks, for speeches, booklets, annual reports, and other informational material. Compilation of a basic reference loose-leaf manual for those involved in the career education program should have a high priority. There is some question whether it is better to have separate manuals for information and for policy guidance or to combine these needs into one. Comparative information from the other schools should be collected and filed.

Feedback involves a periodic sampling of community opinion about the schools. It is urgent that a community opinion survey be conducted as soon as possible to determine the level of information held by the public on school matters, to ascertain attitudes toward the schools, and to determine the composition of the educational power structure. Such a survey is needed immediately (1) to plan a constructive, comprehensive public information program for the coming year, and (2) to establish a benchline against which the community relations program can be measured in succeeding years. This is a research project, and it should be used to develop more effective ways of communicating with, and involving the public in, the education of its young as well as to develop more relevant educational curricula.

To help insure success of career education, channels which provide a steady input of opinions and ideas to those responsible for career education must be created and kept open. Monitoring the community opinion environment is a heavy responsibility for those charged with administration in general and for the Director of Community Relations in particular. A constant watch must be kept on the horizon for small clouds of discontent that might blow up a storm around any new educational pattern. Feedback from the community is an essential ingredient in keeping career education adjusted to its community. The reliance here must be more on informal channels of feedback than on the periodic community surveys suggested above. Time and costs will not permit community surveys on a basis frequent enough to do the job. The following are several informal feedback techniques.

Personal Contacts. All administrative personnel must make it a point to move freely about in all sectors of the community listening to ideas and criticisms about career education. This is a special responsibility of the Director of Community Relations. He should consult regularly with local news media, gatekeepers, business and labor leaders, political leaders, school and municipal officials, and other influentials in the educational power structure. Ability to develop varied contacts and to listen sensitively are hallmarks of the competent public relations practitioner. The community relations director dare not become desk-bound.

Advisory Committees. The opportunity for public service will bring to career education the services of able men and women who can be helpful in making constructive suggestions for the program's implementation and improvement, and who can be useful in building a bridge with the several sectors of the community. Advisory committees create the opportunity for participation. Advisory committees, representing public groups, occasionally serve as heat shields to absorb public criticism. Once interested, these influential persons are likely to return to their own group and carry the ball for career education. Advisory committees exact a price--the advice offered must be listened to and responded to; one wants to be a part of a "front" or a facade.

Conferences and Open Meetings. One of the most effective devices for two-way communication is the conference called to consider a particular subject or the open meeting popular in some communities. Such conferences and meetings should always include question and answer sessions in a permissive atmosphere which allows citizens to air their questions or complaints. Such meetings provide administrators, and teachers, with healthy baths in community opinions through give-and-take discussion.

Media Reports. The community relations director should be responsible for monitoring the news media, and using newspaper clipping and radio-TV monitoring services. This will provide administrators with a record of the information printed or broadcast about the program, and an indication of the fuel being injected in the community public opinion machine. Digests or photocopies of news clippings about career education and relevant subjects should be periodically supplied to all those involved. Editorial opinion and letters to the editor should receive particular attention.

Editorials and letters do not measure nor necessarily reflect community opinion but quite often they raise warning signals of storms gathering on the horizon.

Information Center or Ombudsman. To accommodate the parent or citizen seeking information or wishing to lodge a complaint, a number of institutions have established information centers inquiry rooms; or created an ombudsman, an idea developed in the Scandanavian governments centuries ago and now finding popularity in education. A well publicized source of authentic information is needed, manned by courteous, receptive personnel to which any parent or citizen can go to obtain information or file a complaint.

Thus, to the community relations staff organization suggested earlier, we add a public inquiry desk. The desk is urgently needed to give prompt information to parents, teachers, businessmen, and employers. Such telephone calls should be switched to this desk for tactful, courteous handling. The inquiry desk should be located in the lobby or some easily accessible spot in the central school administration building. The desk and its telephone number should be constantly publicized.

Such a center need not be an elaborate arrangement and could be a part of the community relations director's office. One of the frustrations of today's citizen is not knowing where and how to obtain information from public agencies.

Planning and Programming

The school system will not have sufficient money and manpower to do all that could and should be done in developing the necessary public understanding of career education. Thus, it is imperative that every effort and every expenditure be made to count toward predetermined objectives. This requires thoughtful planning and tailor-made programming. Thoughtful planning will produce the desired integrated program in which the total effort results in definite accomplishments toward specific goals. Planning also provides a means of gaining staff participation and support for the community relations program. It also puts the emphasis on positive community relations programs and lessens the effort required to put out fires of protest. Also, a planned program permits unhurried deliberation on choice of themes, timing, and tactic.

The planning is based on the intelligence collected in the fact finding and feedback step, which served to define problems, delineate publics, and determine their views and values.

Too many public relations programs have their priorities haphazardly determined by external pressures, not by internal planning. Others make the mistake of assuming that a full reporting of day-to-day activities of a school program will bring full understanding to the public. This is fallacious. Only a planned program will bring before the public, over time, a complete picture of the career education program. The following are some major requirements for a planned community relations program:

1) A carefully delineated strategy to be followed and the steps to be taken in development of a strategy, so that the action moves with precision and reaches its peak of impact at the appropriate time. For example, in generating public understanding for career education, should it be presented as a bold, new educational pattern which scraps present ones or should it be presented as a modification and strengthening of the present curriculum patterns? The latter is recommended because experience and research agree that it is easier to gain acceptance of an entirely new idea or system. The emphasis should be on "strengthening" not "scrapping" the present system. Also, strategy includes the matter of timing. The career education informational program should be long-range and rational, not "hip-hip hurray" emotional, designed to get a lot of public visibility in the next year or so. Here, a warning must be posted against raising false expectations in public relations for career education. Americans, including educators, are suckers for the shortcut and miracle. Their resulting disillusionment is usually as extreme.

2) A thorough appraisal and development of all the principal issues involved in the program and agreement on the relative importance to be given each issue. This keeps the focus of public interest on the objectives and issues

which have the most widespread appeal. Basic themes must be held to a minimum. In short, a matter of urgent priority is to develop the case for career education. Much material has been assembled to this end. A clear, comprehensive statement of the case for career education must be set down in printed form and must be adapted to a slide-talk or flip-chart presentation. The case must be straightforward, simple in style, with emphasis on the broad outlines. Educators too often try to cram a maze of detail down the throats of what they mistakenly think to be a captive audience. With most of your publics, you will have accomplished much if you get across, convincingly, a few basic themes and a generalized understanding of the aims of your innovative program. You cannot expect your audience to share your zeal for career education. The need to eschew "education-ese" in preparing this case and all supporting informational materials cannot be stressed too strongly.

3) A complete outline of all the organizational aspects of the campaign, the foundation and framework for the staff and for the volunteer organization required to implement these plans. Clearcut lines of authority, objectives of each element in the organized effort, and a timetable of priorities are required. This aspect includes establishment of priorities of publics to be informed about career education. Confusion is avoided only if everyone knows who does what and when it is to be done. For example, in delineating the influential publics whose support and cooperation the program's success requires, one starts at the center and works outward in concentric circles along these lines:

INTERNAL: Administrators--teachers--school boards--advisory committees--parents--pupils, and any other key internal publics.

EXTERNAL: Press business leaders--labor leaders--influentials in educational power structure--organized groups--general public.

4) A detailed plan for the use of all media-background briefings, radio and TV materials, motion pictures, and an annual report.

Communication and Action

A positive, continuous program of communication is necessary to fully inform all interested publics which must support career education as it moves from planning to implementation to action to results. This information output must be targeted to specific groups and be stated in specific terms to accomplish results. Two of the most important words in public relations are "specificity" and "aimlessness." Effective communication is characterized by specificity. Ineffective community relations work is characterized by aimlessness, information arrows shot blindly into the air to land the communicator knows not where. Gaining acceptance of innovative ideas, such as career education, is more than simply beaming information on an audience through a mass medium. *Acceptance of a new idea goes through five stages over a period of time varying from five to fifteen years.* The communications step requires influencing opinion among both sizeable and distinct groups. This information effort must be directed to those publics delineated in the fact finding process and must be couched in the values, views, and vocabulary of the target public, not in the self-centered concerns and specialized jargon of the sender. The sender of messages must be constantly reminded that the predispositions of the receiver determine, first, whether the message gets in, and second, the way the message is perceived and interpreted.

A large number of studies by rural sociologists have resulted in construction of a Diffusion Process Model in gaining awareness, understanding, and adoption of a new pattern of doing things (See Figure 1). Exploration of this model and the studies underlying it can be useful to those responsible for gaining public acceptance of career education (Lionberger, 1961; Coleman, Katz, and Menzel, 1966).

AWARENESS	INTEREST	EVALUATION	TRIAL	ADOPTION
Learns about a new idea or practice	Gets more information about it	Tries it out mentally	Uses or tries a little	Accepts it for fullscale and continued use
1. Mass media radio, TV, newspapers, magazines	1. Mass media	1. Friends and neighbors	1. Friends and neighbors	1. Same
2. Friends and neighbors, mostly other farmers	2. Friends and neighbors	2. Agricultural agencies	2. Agricultural agencies	2. Same
3. Agricultural agencies, extension, and vo-ag	3. Agricultural agencies	3. Dealers and salesmen	3. Dealers and salesmen	3. Mass media
4. Dealers and salesmen	4. Dealers and salesmen	4. Mass media	4. Mass media	4. Dealers and salesmen

Figure 1. Diffusion Process Model

It should be noted that the media and agencies involved have a varying impact at each stage of the process. The news media have their greatest impact in creating awareness, but become less influential as the adoption process proceeds. Ultimately, trusted peer groups becomes the strongest force, closely followed by the technical experts.

There are three fundamental facts the communicator must keep in mind:

(1) The audience for his communication consists of people who live, work and play with one another in the framework of social institutions. Consequently, each person is subject to many influences, of which the communicator's message is only one;

(2) People tend to read, watch, or listen to communications which present points of view with which they are sympathetic or in which they have a deep personal stake; and

(3) The response we want from our intended receiver must be REWARDING TO HIM or he is not likely to respond.

Evaluation

As each phase of the informational campaign is completed, it should be subjected to research to determine its degree of effectiveness. Evaluation research leads back to step one - "Fact Finding and Feedback." This is the way the wheel is supposed to turn in mature, sophisticated information programs.

Evaluation, in short, is the common sense of learning from experience. In evaluation we seek, through research, answers to such questions as: "How did we do; would we have been better off if we had tried something else?" One reason education public relations has made painfully slow progress over the years is because there is too little emphasis on the merciless audit of completed projects and too much emphasis on the sheafs of clippings a publicity program can produce.

Cunningham (1968) has suggested the following as questions when evaluating public relations programs:

1. Was the program adequately planned?
2. Did those concerned understand the job you wanted done?
3. Did all affected departments and executives cooperate?
4. How could you have made the results more effective?
5. Did you reach all pertinent audiences?
6. Did you receive desired publicity before, during, and after the completion of the program?
7. Could you have made better provisions for unforeseen circumstances?
8. Did the program stay within the budget? If not, why?
9. What provisions did you make in advance for measuring results? Were they adequate?
10. What steps were taken to improve future programs of the same type on the basis of this measurement? (1968:4&5)

Evaluation takes two forms--pretesting and post-testing. Pretesting is background briefing, a pamphlet, or an annual report on a sample of the intended audience beforehand can often avoid embarrassing mis-cues and result in more effective communication. Post-testing is used to determine the size and composition of the audience reached, degree of information changes, and attitude modification resulting from communication programs. As emphasized earlier, research on the supporting information-community relations program in this project ought to be properly considered part of the required research.

THE KEY PUBLICS

The effort to gain the required support for career education must be carefully targeted to reach those publics whose support and cooperation is essential for success. The exact composition and priority of these publics will vary from school to school and can be best determined by a survey of each community. Nonetheless, it is safe to say that the following publics have the highest priority.

The Internal Public

The administrators and teachers responsible for revising the school curriculum K through 12 to meet the goals of career education are the prime public. Unless they believe in the worth of career education and strive to achieve its goals, the program will not succeed. Getting administrators and teachers, most of whom are generally set in their ways, to adopt new course content and new instructional methods is a difficult task. I venture to assert that the program will meet more ingrained institutional resistance than the project leaders appear to think at this stage. Building internal support is primarily the task of the school administrators. To accomplish this they must be aided by a supporting internal information program. The community relations staff must advise and assist the administrators, teachers, and school board members with internal information; with community opinion feedback; and with counsel on ways of enlisting organizational and community support.

The primary responsibility for internal leadership and generation of internal enthusiasm for career education rests with those in charge of staff development. Yet the line between internal communication and external relationships is a thin, fuzzy one at best. This will require close, cordial cooperation of the Director of Staff Development and the Director of Community Relations to the end that favorable internal opinions flow into the community and favorable community opinions flow into the school system in a mutually supporting relationship. Many corporations have found it impossible to draw a clear line of demarcation between internal relationships and external relationships and have combined their personnel and public relations staff functions into one department (Cutlip and Center, 1971).

All those involved in career education need to serve as interpreters and salesmen for the program. An intensive training program in communications and in community relations is suggested. Special training and development programs must necessarily be considered for new staff members in the communications area as well as the human relations training area. Formal attention to the coordination of this effort should be a primary concern of the Director of Staff Development, assisted by the Director of Community Relations who can supply expertise and supporting materials. Such programs are particularly important for the sub-district community relations and human relations personnel. It is possible to identify promising young educators who might be supplied with the necessary communications and community relations skills needed to carry career education to the community.

The Influential Publics

As suggested earlier in this paper career education will require community involvement and support to an unprecedented degree. This means establishing effective lines of communication with the influential groups of the school community power structure.

One of the fundamental elements of the community power structure is the network of influences existing among individuals and organizations involved in the community's decision-making process. The director of community relations and in fact, the whole school staff must understand this network if they are to act as intelligent observers and effective communicators in the school community. Too much public relations practice today ignores the significance of the community power structure and its components. Research has shown that social systems of all types--family, organization, and community--have individuals who predominate in the decision-making of that system. These individuals may be referred to as leaders, influentials, or legitimatizers. They are the ones who can and do influence the changes to be made in the social system. They do this by exercising their social power. The manner in which power actors react to proposed changes often depends on (1) what the proposal involves, (2) when they were informed, (3) how they were informed, and (4) who informed them. Information and its timing is the key, and it must be taken into full account in dealing with the community's educational power structure.

Dahl (1958) found that there are different power structures for different community issues and problems. The Yale political scientist writes:

> Any investigation that does not take into account the possibility that different elite groups have different scopes is suspect...there is no doubt that small groups of people make key decisions. It appears to be the case, however, that the small group that runs urban development is not the same small group that runs public education, and neither is quite the same as the two groups that run the two political parties (1958:463-469).

Determination of and establishment of communication with the educational power structure in the school community is a matter of highest priority.

There are as many models of community power structure as theories, but a relatively independent number of components of community power exist. Form and Miller (1960) offer the following list:

1) The institutional power structure of the society, which refers to the relative distribution of power among societal institutions.

2) The institutionalized power structures of the community, which refers to the relative distribution of power among local institutions.

3) The community power complex, a power arrangement among temporary or permanent organizations, special-interest associations, and informal groups emerging in specific issues and projects.

4) The top influentials, which refer to the persons reputed to be of most influence and power in community decision-making. Particular decision-makers are drawn into various systems of power relations according to the community issues or projects that arise.

5) The key influentials, who are acknowledged leaders among the top influentials.

While the public relations practitioner may not always be able to identify each of these components and their parts, he or she should at least have some general understanding of how they function in the decision-making process. Ideally, he or she would be working towards building a power structure model of his community. In this sense, the process of identifying influentials can be considered as one step toward achieving a thorough understanding of a community's power structure.

Once the key publics in the community have been determined and their leaders identified, the community relations staff should schedule a series of background briefings to explain the objectives of career education and the ways in which the school system will move to achieve them.

Citizen committees to advise and assist with development of the K-12 career education program and assist with the instruction once it gets under way are a useful bridge to the community power structure. Hamlin (1960) states, "The principal, useful purpose a citizens committee can serve is to share with a board of education, a school staff, and others in the development of policies a board will enact. If a committee functions well as a partner in policy development, it has an opportunity to serve four other purposes." These other purposes are to share in planning school programs, to make studies of community needs and the effects of schools on the community, to help in providing effective communication between school and community, and the obligation to support recommendations in which the board and committee have concurred. Constructive use of citizen committees is an example of successfully facing the reality of the open system.

The News Media

The news media serving each school must be fully utilized to keep the public adequately informed at each step of the program's evolvement. Changes in school patterns, shifts in emphasis, and changes in curriculum create a vacuum of curiosity. This curiosity and concern will be generated by the word-of-mouth communications carried to the community grapevine by teachers, pupils, and parents of pupils. The vacuum of curiosity must be filled with timely, authentic information or else it will be filled with rumor and hearsay. A steady, factual information program that will keep the public

informed must be carried to the news media and by them to the public. The emphasis in this program should be on new developments with each news story used to interpret the aims of career education to those citizens interested in schools and education problems. At most, this will be no more than 50 percent of the readers, listeners, or viewers. Those citizens not interested in schools and education and the young will automatically tune themselves out. This public information program should be targeted to the education public of the community. Care should be exercised in all news releases to avoid "education-ese" and to guard against creating false expectations of fundamental reforms overnight or of insuring 100 percent placement at the end of the public schooling for the student, although this is a career education goal. The public information program should be geared for the long haul; no effort should be made in the planning year to heavily publicize the program.

Proponents of career education should understand that the schools must take the initiative to insure that the public gets the information it requires to understand the program and to cooperate with those effecting the changes in school curricula. The news media are neither equipped nor adequately motivated to take on this task. The news media do not have the manpower, either in terms of numbers or expertise, to fully and constructively report public education. Furthermore, the media's news values, which emphasize the unusual, the conflictive, and the unusual personality, tend to emphasize sports and the superficial in the reporting of public education. Evidence to support these generalizations is readily available..

In a study carried out in Ohio (Rings, 1971), a sample of school districts with a full-time information officer was matched against a comparable sample of school districts without an information officer. It was found that those districts with information officers received more coverage and greater financial support in the community.

> In the comparison between the director and non-director systems, the director districts had significantly more stories and space on pages with higher probable readership.... The districts with (information) directors had a higher proportion of student and public affairs stories concerning the school's administration and sports.

Non-director districts; sports coverage dominated their news space in inches.

Press coverage of schools still emphasize athletics and student activities by a wide margin. Some years ago a study made of Michigan newspapers (dailies and weeklies) found that school news is one of the least well-written portions of the newspaper and that the absence of "significant news" is a more acute problem. In the opinion of the director of the study, the findings "speak eloquently on the failure of some vital school problems to receive sufficient treatment in the Michigan Press" (Roe, 1957). Career education is a complex, substantial story that is not likely to receive "sufficient treatment" unless the schools take the initiative.

George Gerbner (1967) made a study of education news for the U.S. Office of Education and concluded: "The celebrated 'Boom on the School Beat' appears to have been limited to metropolitan dailies and to have been more a sign of recognition than a rise in the proportion of all special editorial employees holding school news assignments on American daily papers...Mobility on the job is still generally high. The 'hard news local angle' policy sets the style of reporting on most papers. The local orientation of the American daily paper assures the reader a fair amount of community school news..."

Chaffee (1967) found that the newspaper is providing the public with more school information than any other source, but suggests it could do more. He also suggests that the news media provide an impersonal mode of contact with the schools that may help transcend social barriers. He adds that the news media fail most in providing a feedback from the public to schools, suggesting: "The press might well consider giving more attention to the feedback function" (1967:26).

In sum, to insure informed support and to prevent public misunderstandings of career education, the school must have a competent person on its staff who knows the values and mechanics of the news media to insure that this channel of public education is fully utilized.

A FINAL NOTE

This paper, in essence, calls for district wide communications programs that will provide more adequate, more rapid internal communications and that will provide the affected public with more accurate information on their district's schools in general and on career education in particular. It also calls for a decentralized community relations and communications program that will effectively bridge the gulf between the schools and those persons whose participation and support are essential for improvement of the public school curriculum. A strong community relations program is essential to the improvement of educational opportunities for all persons.

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[1] Bibliographical entries followed by an ED number are generally available in hard copy or microfiche through the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC). This availability is indicated by the abbreviations MF for microfiche and HC for hard copy. Order from ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS), P.O. Drawer O, Bethesda, Maryland 20014. Payment must accompany orders totaling less than $10.00. Documents available from the Government Printing Office may be obtained from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402.

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DESCRIPTORS - *Career Education; *Community Relations; *School Community Programs; Program Planning; *Publicize; *Public Relations; Change Agents; Communication (Thought Transfer); Diffusion; Management; School Community Relationship.

ABSTRACT - Career education represents an effort of the public school system to be responsive to changing community needs and values. A two-way communication program between the school and the community is vital if career education is to gain the necessary acceptance to be effective. This paper calls for a district-wide decentralized community relations and communications program to provide the public with more accurate information on schools in general and on career education in particular. Aspects of a constructive community relations program are outlined, with staffing requirements, the organizational structure, and developmental steps suggested as a guide for program planners. Predetermined objectives and careful planning are emphasized for the diffusion of the career education concept, and major planning requirements are detailed in the paper. Support of these key publics is essential for success; the internal public (administrators and teachers), the influential publics in the community, and the news media. Each of these publics is described, along with the ways in which the school system may move to achieve its objectives. The schools must take the initiative to insure that the public gets the information it requires to understand the program and to cooperate with those effecting changes in school curricula.